DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 043 702 UD 010 649

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TITLE	Negro Grandparents: Interactional and Subjective Role Aspects.
INSTITUTION	Duke Univ., Durham, N.C. Medical Center.
SPONS AGENCY	Public Health Service (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	Apr 70
NOTE	21p.
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Behavioral Science Research, Family (Sociological Unit), *Family Relationship, *Family Role, Grandchildren, *Grandparents, Low Income, *Negroes, Parent Child Relationship, Southern States, Urban Areas
IDENTIFIERS	Adams Kinship Schedule

ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is the role interactions and subjective characteristics of relationships between Negro grandparents and grandchildren in a southern urban low-income area. A modified form of the Adams Kinship Schedule was used to collect the data from personal interviews in the home setting. Findings indicate that grandmothers are important in kinship network with important tasks in the rearing of grandchildren; closer bonds exist between grandmothers and their daughters than between grandfathers and their sons; and there were present extended or three-generational families in urban areas. Most grandparents displayed strong affectional closeness with their grandchildren, less value concensus, and even less close identification. The role of Frazier's "Granny" remains visable, although declining. [Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document.] (Author/DM)

ED043702

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Negro grandparents: Interactional and subjective role aspects[1]

by

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As Kahana and Kahana (1969) have noted, most studies of grandparents have focused on grandparents, rather than on grandchildren. In that respect, this paper does not differ from most such studies, for its focus is also upon grandparenthood as viewed by the grandparent. The paper does differ, however, from most such studies on grandparenthood in that its specific focus, is upon Negro grandparents--both grandmothers and grandfathers.

UD010649

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[1] Research upon which this paper is based was partially supported by the Center for the Study of Aging and Human Development, Duke University Medical Center, Durham, North Carolina, and by Grant 1 RO1MH16554-01 from the Public Health Service, United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. The paper was presented at the annual meeting of The Southern Sociological Society, Atlanta, Georgia, April, 1970.

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Frazier's (1939) classic description of "Granny: The Guardian of the Generations" depicted an energetic, courageous, and devoted "Granny" whose prestige and importance were great during and after the Civil War. "Granny" did not cease her watching "over the destiny of the Negro families as they have moved in ever increasing numbers to the cities during the present century," wrote Frazier, but, gradually, with the increase in the father's authority in family relations and in the economic subordination of the woman, there was a concomitant decrease in the prestige and importance of "Granny." Frazier made no mention therein of grandfathers.

Since Frazier's (1939) classic appeared, a number of changes (many of which he anticipated correctly) have occurred, and continue so to do, within the sociocultural and socioeconomic environments of Negroes. Such changes have, and will continue to have, impacts upon Negro families, for, as Glazer (1966) aptly observed, "...the family makes the social conditions.../and/ social conditions make the family."

Purpose and methodology

Given the types of changes which have occurred, and which continue to occur, one area of interest might well be that of role interactions between grandparents and grandchildren in Negro communities. In fact, [this paper has as its major purpose the presentation and analysis of some data pertaining to interactional and subjective characteristics of relationships between more grandparents residing within a predominantly low-income, urban area, scheduled for urban renewal and the grandchildren whom they felt they saw most

often., Some comparisons of grandparental subgroups, ~~as pointed out below, are also given,~~ as well ~~as~~ certain implications arising therein.

The data about grandparents and their grandchildren were culled from a larger and continuing study of changing kinship relations among a southern, urban, Negro sample currently involving the present writer. Data were available, at the time of this writing, for a total of 68 grandparents (whose ages, marital statuses, and subgroups are shown in Table 1 below).

(Table 1 about here)

Comparisons of significant differences (utilizing chi-square) in the interactional and subjective characteristics were based upon three major grandparental subgroupings: (a) grandmothers and grandfathers; (b) younger (i.e., under 50 years of age) and older (i.e., 50 or more years of age) grandparents; and (c) grandparents living alone and grandparents not living alone. Future comparisons between other subgroupings, such as between employed and nonemployed grandmothers, employed and nonemployed grandfathers, grandmothers with spouse and grandmothers without spouse, and grandfathers with spouse and grandfathers without spouse, in process, were not available for inclusion herein.

Using F, no significant age difference characterized grandparents living alone and grandparents not living alone. Using t, grandfathers were significantly older than were grandmothers ($p>.001$), due largely to the fact that no grandfathers under the age of 50 happened to have been interviewed thus far in the larger study, and the younger grandparents were significantly younger than were the older grandparents ($p>.001$).

These 68 grandparents had an approximate (approximate in that a few Ss were not precise, including one S with "about 40"grandchildren) total of 391 grandchildren, or a mean of 5.8 grandchildren for each subject. About 12 percent had grandsons only; about 15 percent, granddaughters only. (See Table 2 for limited background data on these grandchildren.)

(Table 2 about here)

A modified form of the Adams' (1968) Kinship Schedule was used to collect the data in personal interview settings in the Ss' homes.

Also, following Adams (1968), interactional characteristics referred to the "frequency of interaction and kinds of or occasions for interaction with" grandchildren, including "telephoning and letter writing, or the non-face-to-face means of keeping in touch." His eight "contact types" (i.e., home visiting, social activities, voluntary organizations, working together at the same occupation and location, rituals, communication, aid received from a specific relative, and aid given to a specific relative) were modified.

The seven "contact types" utilized were those of 1) home visiting; 2) social activities (including reading); 3) church; 4) luxury gifts; 5) communication; 6) aid received from grandchildren; and 7) aid given to grandchildren.

A word about the category of "social activities": although an open category was provided for "other" responses about social activities in the modified instrument, only an extremely minute percentage of the subjects reported any other social activities with their grandchildren than those about which they were queried directly.

One problem may be that the principal investigator was unduly influenced (on a subconscious level) by her daughter's (and only child) age (three years) during the item-selection process. In retrospect that appears to have influenced the item-selection of social activities occurring regularly between grandparents and grandchildren.

Additionally, and in the same vein, these conceptions of regular grandparent-grandchild activities were probably also influenced by a middle-class model of interactional patterns between grandparents and grandchildren.

Thus, the analysis of the preliminary data in the larger study (a portion of which is reported in this paper) has, at the very least, reemphasized the fact that predominantly low-income subjects are much less likely than are middle-class subjects to expand upon their responses in an interview setting, or to suggest new responses. Hence, it is useful to attempt to list all possible relevant, responses existing in reality and which would normally emerge if the "correct" questions are proffered.

In any case, the reader should be aware especially of this limitation.

The subjective characteristics (also following Adams, 1968) involved largely those of

> ...affectional closeness, value consensus, identification, and obligation. Determination of affectional closeness is in answer to the question: "How close would you say you feel to your...?" Responses of "quite close" and "extremely close" are combined and designated as strong feelings of closeness. Value consensus is ascertained by the following question: "Do you and your... agree in your ideas and opinions about the things you consider really important in life?" Answers of "yes, completely," and "yes, to a great extent" appear to indicate substantial value consensus, as distinct from value divergence. Idealization of or identification with the relative is determined by responses to

> this question: "Would you like to be the kind of person your... is?" Close identification is based upon the responses "yes, completely," and "in most ways." Feelings of obligation are ascertained...by asking...how important certain reasons for keeping in touch are in relation to a particular relative (pp. 14-15).

FINDINGS

When the data were controlled for grandparents with at least one son with offspring and at least one daughter with offspring, who either both resided elsewhere, the grandchild identified as the one seen most often was that of the S's daughter's child, as opposed to the son's child, a finding which is consistent with Young and Willmott's (1957) observation that grandchildren usually have more frequent interaction with their mother's mother than with their father's mother. The rare exceptions occurred in the cases of Ss' whose sons' children resided with them.

INTERACTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS. Table 3 contains percentage distributions of the first five "contact types" for Ss who had interacted with the grandchild whom they saw most often in the given activity at least once during the past year.

(Table 3 about here)

Available responses included daily, weekly or more often, monthly or more often but less than weekly, a few times during the past year, several times during the past year, at least once during the past year, and never during the past year. They are reported only for at least once during the past year, inasmuch as the vast majority of the Ss failed to report any greater regularity of frequency of occurrence. That is a second limitation of this study.

One possible explanation of the lack of regularity is that some of the Ss (less than half) had no grandchildren residing within the same city. Future analyses of these data, with the addition of new Ss based upon a breakdown of Ss with grandchildren residing in the same household, Ss with grandchildren residing in the same city but not in the same household, and Ss with no grandchildren living within the same city, should isolate some effects of locale differences.

The seven "contact type" patterns of interactional activities between grandparents and their grandchildren revealed some differences between the comparative subgroups, as discussed below.

Home visiting. A larger percentage of younger grandparents, grandparents living alone, and grandmothers reported engagement in visiting with their grandchildren than did their respective counterparts. This pattern held true even when the data were controlled to exclude grandchildren living in the same household as the grandparent. Grandparents living alone and grandparents not living alone, could be distinguished, as expected, in that the latter reported greater frequency of contact with grandchildren ($p>.05$). Some Ss with grandchildren in their household reported home visiting with grandchildren elsewhere.

Social activities. Specific activity items were going to the parks and/or walking, attending movies, grocery shopping, shopping other than grocery shopping, and taking local trips or vacations with grandchildren.

Most Ss interacted w/grandchildren infrequently in these activities. The

modal form of interaction shopping other than grocery shopping, (as can be seen in Table 5, which contains the rank position, in decreasing order of

(Table 5 about here)

frequency of occurrence, of these activities). Joint movie attendance was quite rare.

Reading as an interactional activity, occurred almost solely with younger grandchildren, especially those under six or seven years of age.

Church. Older grandparents, grandparents living alone, and grandfathers reported church activities (most often joint attendance at regular morning worship services) with grandchildren less frequently than did younger grandparents, grandparents not living alone, and grandmothers respectively.

Younger grandparents were significantly more likely to be accompanied by or to accompany a grandchild to a church activity than were older grandparents ($p>.05$), attributable, in part, to greater shared residences among the former. Joint church activity may also be related to age (i.e., as both increased in age, their joint church attendance decreased).

Luxury gifts. During the past year, with the exception of younger grandparents, the Ss reported luxury gift-giving, which may be due to such reasons as those of a) the greater likelihood of younger grandparents being employed; b) grandparents being more prone to present younger grandchildren with luxury gifts (including especially toys), while more practical gifts are given to older grandchildren; and c) in some instances, younger grandparents are much more likely to have fewer grandchildren than are older grandparents.

Communication. The two non-face-to-face communication patterns investigated were those of a) telephone for all grandparent-grandchild pairs having access to telephone service; and b) written correspondence from grandchildren residing elsewhere to their grandparents, and from the latter to the former.

About one-fourth to one-third of each of the grandparental subgroups with grandchildren out-of-town reported that they had written to their grandchildren at least once during the preceding year. A larger percentage usually reported that they had received written correspondence from such grandchildren. On the whole, written communication appeared to be infrequent.

Although grandfathers and grandparents not living alone were more likely to report no communication during the past year by telephone than were grandmothers and grandparents living alone, and older grandparents only were significantly different ($p>.05$). About 86 percent of the younger grandparents reported no non-face-to-face interaction (due, perhaps, to the younger ages of their grandchildren and the greater possibility of grandchildren residing with them), while only about 36 percent of the older grandparents were so categorized.

Few Ss communicated with grandchildren via telephone monthly or more frequently. Most Ss reporting at least one such telephone call attributed it to a special occasion or an emergency.

Aid received from grandchildren. Are grandchildren useful? As can be seen in Table 4, about 50 percent of the grandfathers, 25 percent of the grandmothers, 20 percent of the younger and about 33 percent of the older grandparents, and about 28 percent of grandparents living alone and about 37 percent of grand-

parents not living alone. All felt that grandchildren were "not much help at all."

Nevertheless, further inquiry about specific items of assistance revealed that most grandparents did regard themselves as having received some aid from their grandchildren during the past year. The modal responses (ignoring, where necessary, the category of "not much help at all") for grandmothers, grandfathers, grandparents not living alone, and older grandparents were the same: "a feeling of usefulness." Grandparents living alone and younger grandparents had a modal response of "visits."

Thus, the two areas in which these grandparents felt grandchildren were most often were not really areas of material assistance, but areas of psychological support and/or companionship.

Grandchildren were usually not of assistance to grandparents in writing letters, reading, etc., nor in the area of transportation. They also differed significantly in that grandparents living alone were much more likely to be visited by grandchildren than were grandparents not living alone ($p>.05$). The latter-and expectedly so-were much more likely to receive assistance with house or yard chores than were the former ($p>.05$). Younger grandparents were also more likely to receive some assistance with house or yard chores ($p>.05$), and advice from grandchildren with much greater frequency ($p>.05$) than did older grandparents.

Aid given to grandchildren. Some "Grannies" yet exist! About 44 percent of the grandmothers, about 56 percent of grandparents not living alone, and

about 82 percent of the younger grandparents were directly involved in providing child care for their grandchildren. In addition, although in far smaller proportions, grandparents "keep the children after school until the parent(s) come home" (most often the mother, and most from work).

Comparative subgroup differences were also present: younger grandparents, as compared with older grandparents, were far more likely to provide financial assistance directly to the grandchild or to the grandchild's parent(s) ($p>.01$), luxury and necessary gifts ($p>.01$), child care ($p>.001$, and housing ($p>.05$); grandmothers participated more often in child care ($p>.05$); and grandparents who lived with others engaged in greater interaction in child care ($p>.001$), and in luxury and necessary gift-giving ($p>.05$).

In all probability, older grandparents participated less in child care, especially at the time of this study, since their grandchildren were generally older than were the grandchildren of the younger grandparents, but, perhaps, participated more actively when the grandchildren were younger. Childrearing roles appeared w/greater frequency among Ss whose grandchildren were not members of intact, nuclear families.

SUBJECTIVE CHARACTERISTICS. In addition to qualitative measures of affectional closeness, value consensus, and identification, data were also elicited on satisfaction of present contact w/and the prime initiator of contacts with grandchildren (as shown in Table 6 below).

(Table 6 about here)

Affectional closeness. All of the younger grandparents and most of the

remaining subgroups verbalized strong affectional closeness to grandchildren. Grandmothers verbalized "extreme closeness" to grandchildren much more often than did grandfathers ($p>.05$).

While insignificant, grandparents not living alone tended to relate greater closeness to grandchildren than did grandparents living alone, suggesting that affectional closeness, under some circumstances, grows stronger when grandchildren live at least near (and sometimes with) grandparents (especially grandmothers) and when they are in the earlier age cycles.

Value consensus. Value divergence between grandparents and grandchildren was more typical than substantial value consensus. Interestingly, the highest proportion of grandparents indicating substantial value consensus with their grandchildren was found among grandfathers! Older grandmothers especially were characterized by value divergence.

Identification with grandchildren. Close identification with grandchildren was the exception. Grandmothers had no pattern of close identification. Only about 5 percent of grandparents living with others exhibited close identification. Most Ss would like to be the kind of person the grandchild was "only in several ways". Almost one-fifth of the Ss stated that they would "not at all" like to resemble the grandchild.

Importance of keeping in touch. Although in the minority, a substantial proportion of the grandparental subjects (see Table 6) felt that an obligation of "keeping in touch" with grandchildren was only "somewhat important". None thought it was unimportant. Grandparents not living alone (68.2%) and younger grandparents (70.0%) felt the obligation was "very important" more

often than did the remaining comparative groups. Grandmothers (46.2%) and grandparents who lived alone (45.0%) were least likely to consider the obligation of keeping in touch as being "very important".

Younger grandparents were the only Ss who felt enjoyment was a "very important" reason to keep in touch more often than was an obligation. For each of the remaining groups, a larger percentage, therefore, felt that the motive of obligation outweighed that of enjoyment.

Satisfaction with present contact. Grandparents who did not live alone were more satisfied with the present contact with grandchildren than were grandparents living alone ($p>.05$), as was also true for younger grandparents as compared with older grandparents ($p>.05$). About 2 percent of the older grandparents and about 4 percent of the grandparents not living alone did express their desire to have less frequent contact with grandchildren. Older grandparents and grandparents living alone, for the most part, desired greater frequency of contact with grandchildren (i.e., they did not see them as often as they would like to).

Ss were asked to list reasons why grandchildren should live near their grandparents and why grandchildren should not live near their grandparents. Their varying responses may be instructive.

Of the 68 Ss, 20.6 percent gave only the response of not knowing or of never having thought about it, while 14.7 percent replied explicitly (and, on occasion, emphatically) that grandchildren should not live near their grandparents, for such reasons as:

"Don't think they should live close "

"...Each generation has to go for himself."

"Unnecessary for them to live near grandparents at all."

"When they grow up they should move and lead their own lives."

"...do not want to be worried with them."

"No, too much trouble. Children don't do right these days."

"Grandchildren shouldn't live near their grandparents because it tends to spoil the child."

"They should stay near their mother and father instead."

Responses of the remaining 64 7 percent could be categorized as those of a) grandparents primarily needing grandchildren (e.g., "You never know what is going to happen. I may need their help anytime;" "Grandparents would enjoy seeing grandchildren more and knowing what they are doing;" "Grandchildren can be a lot of help to their grandparents;" "The grandmother has great love for grandchildren;" and "One reason is probably as you get old you need them to be able to do something for you, such as wait on you or go to the store."); b) grandchildren primarily needing grandparents (e.g., "So they will love their grandparents. One day they might have to live with their grandparents;" "Grandparents can take care of grandchildren better than mothers;" "Grandparents can help parents with children;" "So grandchildren can have proper care;" "So they can help take care of the grandchild. I really feel like the baby is my baby as much as her mother is."); c) mutual needs (e.g., "To keep a closer family;" "Because we need each other;" "Everyone should be close around their family.")

These responses could also be subdivided by a) instrumentality (exchange of material goods and services), and by b) affect.

Almost 31 percent of the grandparents felt that they could give no reason to justify grandchildren not living near their grandparents. About 24 percent felt that parents should have the prime responsibility for rearing children, as exemplified by such direct responses as:

"Parents should raise their own children;" "Parents need to be young to raise children, so children should stay with parents;" "Your children should not try to burden you down with their children;" and "Grandchildren should be with their parents in their own house" (Italics added).

All of the varying responses probably reflected the particular Ss own grandparental experiences. One example was the response of "They should go where their husbands say." In this particular case, the grandparent's daughter had refused to accompany her husband to an out-of-town location, and the subsequent husband-wife separation had place the brunt of childrearing of the grandchildren upon the S.

The remaining responses were of two types: a) grandchildren should not live near grandparents as the latter tend to spoil the former, which according to several subjects could contribute adversely to independent development of the grandchild; and b) grandparents were "too old" to "be bothered or worried" or grandparents had "other things to do," or "more fish to fry."

Prime initiators of grandparent-grandchild contact. Face-to-face contact between grandparents and grandchildren was, according to the subjects, usually

not initiated by the Ss, or so they said. The reported modal initiator for younger grandparents, as was also true for grandfathers and grandparents living alone, was most often the spouse or another individual; for older grandparents, grandmothers, and grandparents not living alone, the grandchild's parent(s). Grandchildren rarely initiated face-to-face contact. Grandfathers and grandmothers differed on this variable ($p>.05$) in that the former reported that they never initiated such contact, and in that the grandchild's parent was the most frequent initiator of such contact.

Who calls whom? The grandparent was most likely to initiate calls among the younger grandparents and the grandfathers, while the grandparents living alone were about as likely to call as the grandchild was to call them. Grandchildren were more likely to call older grandparents, grandmothers, and grandparents not living alone.

Grandfathers were significantly more likely to initiate the telephone communication and, thus, significantly less likely to be called by the grandchild than were grandmothers ($p>.05$).

In any case, a majority of these predominantly low-income grandmothers resembled Frazier's (1939) "Granny." Grandfathers were of less, but probably of increasing importance.

Discussion

Perhaps the most general impression derived from these findings is that of their startling (to some) similarity to comparable findings derived elsewhere about grandparent-grandchild roles and patterns. If that be a valid impression, then the sometimes undue emphasis upon the "peculiarity of "Granny"

among Negro Americans has certainly been not only unwarranted, but probably also quite erroneous.

These findings, e.g., seem to be in general agreement with such findings as those of Shanas, et al. (1968), Streib (1958), Townsend (1957), and Young and Willmott (1957), which, in one or more instances, emphasize such aspects as the usually vivid presence of grandmothers especially in kinship networks, with one of their more important tasks being involvement in rearing of grandchildren; greater involvement of grandmothers than of grandfathers in activities with grandchildren; closer bonds between grandmothers and their daughters and grandchildren than is true for grandfathers and sons; and, in some respect, the presence of extended or three-generational families in urban areas.

In any case, a majority of these predominantly low-income grandmothers resembled Frazier's (1939) "Granny." Grandfathers were of less, but probably of increasing, importance. Most of these grandparents, given the choice, prefer having grandchildren living near, but not with them. Most prefer younger to older grandchildren (cf. Kahana and Kahana, 1968), but there is some indication that very old grandparents become increasingly concerned about having grandchildren available for largely instrumental assistance. The latter is coupled with a psychological need of feeling that someone will be on hand to assist, should such a need arise.

Although the relationship among affectional closeness, value consensus, and identification with grandchild is not yet clear, affectional closeness is probably more positively correlated with value consensus than with identifica-

tion. Ss responses to the identification item reflected such generational gaps as those of appearance, fashion, and taste (e.g., clothing and hair styles, language expressions, smoking and drinking behavior) to a far greater extent than the value consensus item.

The value consensus item more nearly reflected agreement about morals or ethics considered to be sacred, and, in that sense, could be viewed more nearly as Sumner's "mores," while the identification aspects deal more with his "folkways." In any case, one emergent research need is that of examining the relationships between and among affectional closeness, value consensus, and identification with grandchildren.

Since data are also being collected about the subjects' relationships with their mothers, fathers, oldest and youngest children, sibling closest in age, cousin known best, and best friend, some comparisons about the relationships with grandchildren and other relatives and friends would be of use in helping to "locate" grandchildren among the circle of relatives and friends (cf. Jackson, 1969a; Jackson, 1969b; Jackson, 1969c).

Since this was a cross-sectional sample, comparisons by age (i.e., younger and older grandparents) might well be spurious ones. However, some of the differences between younger and older grandparents cited herein would certainly hold up under longitudinal examination, inasmuch as they seem to be differences characteristic of the ages of the grandparents and of the grandchildren.

The interactional characteristics, while appearing to be fairly restricted, are probably typical of such patterns among a similar sample, due to the effects of such factors as inadequate income, transportation, and awareness of and

familiarity with available resources.

Employment as a factor in grandparental roles was alluded to, but a larger sample is necessary in order to obtain some relatively clear-cut patterns. The probability is that employment relates at least to the extension of the range of interactional characteristics, including luxury gift-giving.

Summary

This paper, based upon data collected from 68 predominantly low-income southern, Negro grandparents[1] through personal interviews using a modified form of the Adams' Kinship Schedule, provides a preliminary report of a comparison of interactional (i.e., home visiting, social activities, church, luxury gifts, communication, aid received from grandchildren, and aid given to grandchildren) and subjective (principally affectional closeness, value consensus, and identification) characteristics of relationships with the grandchildren seen most often for three grandparental, comparative groups: a) younger (i.e., under 50 years of age) and older (i.e., 50 or more years of age) grandparents; b) grandmothers and grandfathers; and c) grandparents living alone and grandparents not living alone.

The findings indicate that, where applicable, the grandchild seen most often is usually a daughter's (and not a son's) offspring; that younger grandparents (all of whom were grandmothers), grandmothers, and grandparents not living alone tended to be involved with greater frequency in interactional roles with grandchildren than did older grandparents, grandfathers, and grandparents living alone; that most grandparents displayed strong affectional

closeness with their grandchildren, less value consensus (which was highest among grandfathers), and even less close identification.

Among the implications of the data, in addition to the need for further research and some longitudinal data from the sample-at-hand, are those which suggest that, given a choice, most of these grandparental subjects assume responsibility of childrearing for grandchildren when they feel they must for the "sake of the children," but most prefer grandchildren to live near them, and not with them, and to be reared by their own parents; most of the grandparents tend to be more attached to younger, than to older grandchildren, which may be attributed to a better "need-fit," including those of energy levels and affection needs; and that, among some of the grandmothers in this sample, the role of "Granny" remains viable, although declining.

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